



# Military Theory, Strategy, and Praxis

Jacob W. Kipp, Ph.D., and Lieutenant Colonel Lester W. Grau, Ph.D., U.S. Army, Retired

*I want to speak to you tonight about our effort in Afghanistan—the nature of our commitment there, the scope of our interests, and the strategy that my administration will pursue to bring this war to a successful conclusion.*

— President Barack Obama, West Point, New York, 1 December 2009.<sup>1</sup>

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PHOTO: A statue of Sun Tzu at Encheon, Yurihama, Tottori/prefecture, Japan.

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA began his December 2009 address to the Corps of Cadets at the U.S. Military Academy by invoking strategy. Since the address included comments about a further increase in U.S. military deployments by 30,000 troops, few would argue that the address had no strategic content. However, that admission conceals a glaring problem. Strategy today is not what it was during the Cold War or even during World War II. There is a radical difference between strategy formulated to fight conventional wars and deter nuclear wars and that necessary to conduct armed struggle in the post-modern world. The state no longer defines the nature of the conflict in the latter case.

A review of the literature on war and military thought reveals that the authors most often cited are those of the Western military tradition with a few ancients, one or two Chinese, and a few Russian or Soviet thinkers thrown in.<sup>2</sup> Military theoreticians of old still hold sway in the staff and war colleges of the world's professional militaries. Western students have at least a nodding acquaintance with the writings of Clausewitz, Jomini, Du Picq, Douhet, Fuller, Liddell-Hart, Machiavelli, Mahan, and Upton. Interested students also investigate Sun Tzu. Advanced students study Svechin, Triandafilov, and Tuchachesky to appreciate operational art. Professionals need to know the foundations of their profession, and much of the old theory is still applicable. Over the last decade, in the face of the challenges posed by terrorism and insurgency, a larger community of officers has returned to examining counterinsurgency and low intensity conflict and even named the realm another generation of war, the fourth. Mao, Lawrence, Giap, and Galula are still read, but contemporary authors addressing the complexity of counterinsurgency have gained on them. These include Martin van Creveld, William Lind, Joe Celeski, Shimon Naveh, and David Kilcullen, as well as John Boyd, Deitrich Doerner, Arthur Cebrowski, and William Owens.

## Report Documentation Page

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U.S. Army

**President Obama walks to the lectern to present his strategy on Afghanistan before an audience of a 4,200 cadets and guests in West Point's Eisenhower Hall, 1 December 2009.**

An earlier theory of warfare based on the nations-at-war model emphasized the primacy of conflicts between nations and saw constabulary functions, such as countering brigands and pirates, as a necessary but secondary task. However, contemporary theory has had to give a central place to combating nonstate actors. Since 2001, with the exception of a few weeks in the spring of 2003, the United States and its allies have been making war on nonstate actors, quasi-organizations beyond the brigand or pirate status, but clearly not state actors. Their persistence on the scene suggests that in some parts of the world the Western concept of the nation-state born with the Treaty of Westphalia is under challenge. Indeed, the territory of these nonstate actors encompasses that of several states, even though they formally control little of it. (Although the agents of these nonstate actors impose their control over local judicial systems and religious practices, they carry out few functions of a state.)

This different sort of conflict is challenging the way armed forces organize, equip, and conduct

themselves in the face of this threat. The introduction to U.S. Army and Marine Corps Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, notes that the publication fills “a doctrinal gap.” Iraq and Afghanistan experiences drove the doctrine writers. However, as the manual makes clear, the political dimension of the counterinsurgency demands strategic as well as tactical and operational adjustments. Counterinsurgency, it seems, is a matter for the whole of government, not just the military.

A decade ago, staff colleges taught diplomatic, informational, military, and economic elements of national power and students sought to apply military, informational, diplomatic and economic power to their staff problems. Discussions of conflict today begin with complexity theory, systems analysis, and Design.

To plan a campaign, one must understand the problem at hand, but today’s problems defy templating.<sup>3</sup> Army discussions of Design have focused on operational art, but Design applies to strategy as well. Strategy is the point in the process where one first

addresses the political dimension.<sup>4</sup> Naveh, Challans, and Schneider have called this reorientation “the structure of operational revolution.”<sup>5</sup> It negates the autonomy of operational art. It imposes the centrality of strategy at the highest level by injecting political direction at the start and retaining control of political intervention throughout the campaign by reframing the conflict if necessary. The informational element develops a narrative to explain actions taken and contemplated.<sup>6</sup> The narrative has strategic impact because it feeds directly into the political process.

The impact of technology on warfare in the past few decades has changed the organization of military institutions. The conduct of network-centric warfare and precision strikes across the depth of the battlefield has introduced a new calculus (and modeling) based upon computational power, networks, sensors, and guidance systems. This new technology has had a profound impact on the tactics, organization, and funding priorities of those possessing and facing such capabilities. The struggle between the sides has no clear winner. On some occasions, advanced technology has brought profound successes for those it empowered. On other occasions, those lacking advanced technologies have shown an ability to adapt to its threats and engage in protracted struggles, which democracies find hard to sustain.<sup>7</sup>

U.S. operations in Afghanistan in the fall of 2001 brought lightning success against Taliban field forces and seemed to confirm the decisive impact of Army transformation. Then, the appearance of a post-Saddam insurgency in Iraq and the Taliban’s reconstitution in Afghanistan and Pakistan forced major adjustments. In retrospect, proper planning, proper resourcing, and finishing what we started might have prevented both insurgencies or made them less severe. An insurgency is always weakest as it begins.

Modern militaries and their political leaders have a bias toward seeking decision by annihilation. This has caused much frustration when they confront a protracted struggle. In such cases, war is not the continuation of politics by other means. Rather, war assumes a political content all its own, which, in fact, reshapes the content of the war itself. This insight is not new. Clausewitz, who took part in the campaign of 1812 as a member of the Russian staff, saw first-hand how political content could frustrate military genius by injecting the concept of the people’s war

into the combat at hand. In 1812, Napoleon lost in Russia without a single decisive defeat. Swarms of partisans, winter, and the dogged pursuit of the Russian Army embodied what Lev Tolstoy called *narodnaia voina* (people’s war).<sup>8</sup>

Clausewitz discussed this problem in the context of the Newtonian universe. Today’s military theorists confront a universe of quantum mechanics generating *wicked problems*. Good planning cannot overcome a fundamental misunderstanding of such problems. Decision by annihilation gives way to protracted struggle, where the advantages of advanced technology seem negated. Technology, which seemed to liberate warfare from the risk of stalemate, now seems impotent against the complexity of war among the peoples. Meanwhile, the military educational institutions that once taught Clausewitz as the chief theorist of modern war have had to reconsider “small wars” and insurgency. Technology is no substitute for theory, and war theory lags.

Under transformation, as practiced by the Department of Defense under Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, technology became a substitute for theory; Rumsfeld and DOD assumed that the U.S. military would use its informational advantage and network organization to defeat quickly any opponent in the field and deter most from engaging in conflict. Two protracted wars later, this assumption has proved to be wrong. The unstated assumption of the technological determinists was that a simple template could be applied to all conflicts, and technology would leverage a rapid and decisive outcome. In the aftermath of Operations Desert Storm, Deliberate Force, Allied Force, and Enduring Freedom, it seemed that such was the case. There were messy details—the survival of Saddam, the protracted deployments into Bosnia-Herzegovina, the negotiated end of NATO’s war over

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Kosovo, and the survival of remnants of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. However, they were not enough to stimulate a profound debate about ends, ways, and means. Instead, when planning turned to Iraq, the issue was the size of the force needed to achieve a rapid decision against the Iraqi army in the field and the speedy occupation of Baghdad. The post-conflict environment was simply assumed to be a benign one that would permit the rapid redeployment of U.S. and allied forces out of Iraq.

However, insurgencies are like Tolstoy's unhappy families, they are each unique, and as such, demand complex study to understand their dynamics. This is, of course, almost impossible before the intervening power applies force. However, the longer the war continues, the more apparent it becomes that such study is necessary to define the conflict's political center of gravity and the population's allegiances. Nation building assumes that one can impose an ersatz model of Western institutions and values on these populations. Unfortunately, this misses the point. Stability will come when the population assumes that its security is at hand. No checklist of

projects, which the occupier assumes represents the wishes of the population, will serve as a reliable guide to progress. Progress can only be determined by feedback from the local population, never easy to obtain in a foreign land during an armed insurgency.

Soldiers are not likely to be the best agents for collecting such information, and it matters not whether they are foreign troops or national troops unconnected to the local population. Home guard units and local police can provide such information, but their primary loyalty will be to the immediate security of their community. Building trust with them takes time and great effort. It means accepting the protracted struggle, which the insurgents see as their road to victory.

Instead of making the effort to understand the desires of the local populations, armies will be tempted to apply a template of violence to intimidate the insurgents and accept "collateral damage" to noncombatants as a necessary cost on the road to military victory. That such damage actually broadens the base of the insurgency and makes both the national government and the



Kos93

**Yugoslav Army M-84 tanks withdrawing from Kosovo, June 1999.**

occupying force appear as oppressors is not often apparent until after the damage has occurred. The point is to apply violence in a directed fashion against enemy combatants, as a constabulary applies it to protect the community it is supposed to defend against lawless actions. For soldiers on the ground, this demands a much different set of rules of engagement than those practiced in high-intensity conflict. The rules are similar to those applied under martial law. These new situations demand a clear rethinking of strategic priorities.

Strategy addresses the ends, ways, and means of war and embraces how a nation prepares for and conducts it. There are essentially four components to strategy: the economic, political, military, and informational.<sup>9</sup> Strategy determines how the state will fight the war, the desired phases of the war, and under what conditions and how the state will end it. Strategy sets ends, ways, and means so that political and military leaders can determine progress, or lack of progress, in implementing a strategy.<sup>10</sup> Leaders, however, must explain their conduct to their citizens, the larger international community, and last but not least the population directly affected by the conflict. This implies both knowledge of the population in question and the existence of means to solicit feedback from that population over the course of the conflict. Close examination of most theaters of conflict reveals the existence of many communities that must be monitored within each population. This last point is an admission that this population is not “the other” or an unfortunate complication on a neat battlefield without constraints on firepower. In this sense, strategy recasts the conduct of operations and tactics. It is an admission that soft power may be more effective in achieving stability than kinetic means.

Strategic assessment helps determine how successful various courses of action might be, and once the conflict has begun, permits a review of the conflict and the likelihood of success in following a particular strategy.

Nevertheless, for eight years, the United States and its allies were directly involved in the Afghan conflict without a comprehensive strategy. Our initial intervention was punitive, designed to punish Al-Qaeda and the Taliban for protecting Al-Qaeda. Half-hearted efforts at state-building followed

while Washington shifted its attention to Iraq. In the meantime, Al-Qaeda survived, and the Taliban recovered and became a source of armed insurgency in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Even though counterinsurgency experts agree that the solution to a guerrilla conflict lies primarily in the political and economic realm, no systematic exposition of national or alliance strategy was forthcoming until President Obama stated that the Afghan conflict was a necessary conflict and recast it to embrace both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Obama’s speech at West Point outlined the first clear attempt to articulate U.S. strategy in Afghanistan. Down to this point, the struggle in Afghanistan appeared to be an open-ended commitment to the application of military power in a protracted war, in which success was both undefined and remote and depended most upon the continued application of limited though growing combat power. Strategy seemed to be in the hands of the generals without a political dimension (which makes it a military strategy but hardly an overarching national strategy). After a long review in consultation with his political and military advisors, President Obama articulated a strategy for Afghanistan. Critics may argue over the size of the additional deployment, the chances of success on the ground, and even the importance of the conflict in determining national priorities, but not whether Obama has now an articulated strategy for a conflict deemed necessary to U.S. and NATO interests.

One should not confuse articulating a strategy with predicting the course and outcome of the conflict. There are too many variables beyond the power of even the United States to control. In the final analysis, the peoples of Afghanistan and Pakistan will determine the outcome of the conflict.

Time will tell whether the current strategy has incorporated the right elements to manage the

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conflict to a successful conclusion—a settlement among Afghans that will enhance regional stability and reduce the threat of terrorist attacks emanating from Afghan and Pakistani territory. Every strategy's chance of success depends upon getting the correct definition of the problem in order to apply elements of national power to its solution. Strategy is dialectical in the sense that success depends upon the enemy's responses in the struggle for the loyalty of the population. Moreover, this is not a macro problem subject to a grand exercise in templating. It depends upon local dynamics, which require deep knowledge of each region and its population, understanding the human terrain, and plotting its evolving features.

Recent wars have uncovered a glaring national strategic weakness—the inability to plan beyond a mission with purely military ends, ways, and means. The changing nature of warfare conducted by U.S. opponents has exacerbated this weakness. National strategic thinking and planning is running behind its advancing military without the proper integration and employment of assets. The drawn-out nature of U.S. conflicts demonstrates that *lessons are not being learned*.

## How Did the Mismatch Occur?

During World War II, military theory, strategy, and praxis were in balance. The Cold War and Korean War operated both within and outside comprehensive strategy, since the assumption was that nuclear exchange would destroy the planet, and the strategy was to prevent this from happening. Strategy emphasized the military component and military technology at the expense of the political and economic components. Conventional maneuver war was to occur at the operational level under nuclear-threat. The nuclear balance of terror dominated international relations and restrained risk, so antagonists poked at each other using proxies in limited contests (South Vietnam, Angola, Afghanistan, and numerous “Wars of National Liberation”).

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the bipolar nature of global relations came to an end. The West was in ascendency. Yet how would theory, strategy, and praxis adapt to the new reality? Would nuclear terror matter in a world without nuclear stand-off? What would be the impact of regional nuclear proliferation that put nuclear weapons into the

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hands of states disposed to conflicts along ethnic and religious lines with the remaining “superpower” unwilling or unable to lead the planet in other than the conventional military dimension? With the U.S. superpower’s much-heralded economic dominance fading—as it became a debtor nation with a much-smaller industrial base and a proclivity to engage in credit excesses that shocked global financial markets—what kind of influence could it wield?

**Desert Storm—the stage-setter.** Operation Desert Storm set the stage for today’s dilemma. Potential opponents of American power saw that trying to match the technologically-advanced ground, air, and naval forces of the United States was a sure path to military, if not political, defeat. The U.S. military trained to take on the Soviet Union and, given a half-year to prepare the theater, was unbeatable in Kuwait against a foe that had fought the Iranians to a stalemate in the 1980s. The only apparent way left to oppose America and its allies was to adapt Liddell-Hart’s strategy of “the indirect approach” to the 21st century. That is, enemies had to mitigate the technological overmatch that America depended upon for quick victory by moving the contest to an area where that technology would be degraded (forest, jungle, mountains, delta, or urban center) and making military mass disappear by replacing regular formations with guerrillas and partisans. This strategy is the point that William Lind made in his articles on fourth generation warfare. It was the subtext to all the discussions of “asymmetric warfare” in the 1990s.

**Kosovo.** The Serbs provided the first post-Desert Storm conflict for NATO and U.S. Armed Forces in Kosovo. The Serbs learned from the Iraq experience that camouflage was effective for the Iraqis and moved their army into the mountains and forests, hid their systems, and turned the engines off. They built mockups of tanks, bridges, and command posts. Their goal was to preserve the army for post-conflict use. They were successful. The planned three-day air

operation lasted 78 days. The Serbs did not surrender but negotiated a settlement via the European Union on terms better than those initially offered by NATO. NATO air forces had accurately destroyed their target sets, which included real military facilities as well as mockups and, when that did not bring about Serbian defeat, made civilian infrastructure the primary target, destroying power plants, transportation nodes, and bridges, which disrupted commerce in the Danube region for years. West Germany, Russia, and Finland finally intervened and negotiated a settlement that left the Serbian government intact, postponed the issue of Kosovo's independence, and resulted in a long-term occupation mission for NATO.

Then the Serbian Army emerged from the woods. Trained analysts counted battalions as the units drove out. They were mostly intact. It had survived. John Warden's concentric-circle adaptation of Douhet's theory of air power reduced civilian casualties, but it could not impose a political defeat on an opponent who still held the ground in contention. Kosovo ended with a negotiated settlement, when it appeared that NATO would have to risk fracture over the combat deployment of ground troops into Kosovo. The Clinton administration's narrative of victory through airpower alone began to disintegrate and threaten alliance solidarity. In spite of this, some acclaimed the air-only operation as the new face of warfare: future war would involve U.S. air power supplemented by somebody else's ground forces. There was no need for U.S. ground forces in future conflicts. They would arrive as part of an allied occupying force to serve as a constabulary to maintain a settlement air strikes had dictated.

This view of future war did not incorporate a system for conflict termination beyond continuous bombing, and it assumed no economic or political costs for the air offensive. Any delay in war termination was simply a matter of adjusting the target set to achieve the right physical and psychological destruction against the targeted actor, which, in the case of Serbia, was not the nation but its political and military elite.

**Afghanistan.** Afghanistan provided the second post-Desert Storm conflict. The United States had been attacked. A punitive expedition

would punish those who launched those attacks. The Bush administration, especially Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, wanted to recreate Desert Storm with the sophisticated technology that a decade of acquisitions had provided. However, Afghanistan was not Kuwait or Iraq and none of the conditions of Desert Storm applied. It was not a prepared theater. The United States did not have a half-year to prepare by moving massive stocks and forces into position. The Nation did not want to commit its own ground forces. It wanted another Kosovo with U.S. airpower and someone else's army defeating the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Although Afghanistan was nominally a state, the Taliban was mostly a government in name only—a government of a failing or failed state.

Based on advice from Pakistan, the United States wanted to replace the Pashtun-Taliban with a Pashtun government drawn from the Durrani tribal group—the traditional rulers of Afghanistan. The United States needed a Pashtun force to defeat a Pashtun force. Further, the Pashtun force needed to support a Durrani government. Yet the Durrani were the power base of the Taliban. The majority Pashtun tribal group, the Ghilzai, had their own ambitions and goals.

The United States enlisted the help of an old friend, Abdul Haq, to raise a Pashtun force to fight a Pashtun



DOD, R. D. Ward

**Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld and New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani hold a joint media event at the site of the World Trade Center disaster in lower Manhattan, 14 November 2001.**

force. The United States had already launched an air operation against Afghanistan. It was an air operation designed against a prepared theater targeting the Taliban integrated air defense system, command and control system, tank maintenance facilities, and logistics columns. None of these “target sets” made much sense against the Taliban, and it was clearly not a prepared theater. The air operation quickly ran out of targets.

Abdul Haq, trying to recruit his Pashtun force, begged that the air operation cease because of the civilian casualties it created and because the targets struck were of little advantage in defeating the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, but his pleas were ignored. The only real target in the country was the Taliban and Al-Qaeda field forces deployed against the Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras (and some Pashtun) who belonged to the so-called Northern Alliance. The Taliban and Al-Qaeda were a conventional force, deployed in a linear fashion. With good ground spotters, they were an optimum target for air strikes. They deployed in a single echelon, had no meaningful reserves, and no national mobilization capacity, thus making the field force a very fragile target. Initially, this target was ignored. The United States, for political reasons, did not want the Northern Alliance to break out and seize the country.

Then, on 25 October 2001, the Taliban killed Abdul Haq. There would be no Pashtun force to defeat a Pashtun force. Without committing U.S. ground forces, the Northern Alliance was the only available force. U.S. special operations teams had joined the Northern Alliance forces. They could provide effective ground observation and adjustment to air strikes. When the forces of the Northern Alliance, U.S. airpower, and special operations combined, they quickly overcame the Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces deployed in static positions. The Taliban and Al-Qaeda pushed out rear guards, abandoned the cities, and went to the mountains. After the initial shock, the enemy retreat was coherent, and it succeeded in preserving its leadership, its logistics structure, and much of its force. The U.S. effort did not have a plan or the capability to complete the defeat of the enemy and run the country. The United States assumed that it had won since it now controlled the cities. The Soviets and British had made this same mistake.

It soon became obvious that Al-Qaeda and the Taliban represented movements that could rally political support and raise irregular forces to fight an insurgency. In the meantime, the United States introduced conventional ground forces, which were able to smash the remaining conventional enemy forces. However, there still was no long-term strategy for dealing with the Pashtun problem or establishing a post-conflict order in Afghanistan.

During this interval, it would have been useful for U.S. political and military leaders to have a deep understanding of Afghanistan and its historic pattern of warfare. It starts with the defeat of conventional Afghan forces and then devolves into low-grade, marginally effective guerrilla war. The occupier hardly knows there is a guerrilla conflict going on and is more concerned with criminality than guerrillas. Over time, the overly bold and stupid disappear from the guerrilla force, which becomes more competent and able to challenge the government and occupying forces. The guerrillas do not evolve into a regular army and risk defeat in conventional battles. Eventually, the new government and the occupier confront a full-blown insurgent threat. The guerrilla force tries to win over the countryside and strangle the cities.<sup>11</sup>

**Iraq.** The invasion of Iraq was the third post-Desert Storm conflict. Someone else’s army was not available to overthrow Saddam Hussein. The region was a prepared theater with well-established coalition logistics bases, lines of communication in good repair, and forces positioned forward. The coalition had ample time to get set and into position (although Turkey’s intransigence prevented getting forces in place for an initial northern axis). When the invasion occurred, some Iraqi camouflage measures succeeded, but it is difficult to hide everything in an open desert. SCUD missiles are one thing; divisions are another. The armed forces of Iraq resisted effectively in some areas, but in others, they felt

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it was useless to fight, so they went home. Shortly after the invasion, two Foreign Military Studies Office analysts went to Iraq and interviewed Iraqi military personnel. Their story: “The officers left, and I went home.” However, the Fedayeen resistance was prepared to engage the United States in guerrilla warfare. They had trained for it, and they were equipped.

Airpower proved effective against the Iraqi conventional forces. Airpower was constrained in attacking civilian targets. One result was a lack of wide-spread damage to Baghdad and other cities. The air forces were very precise in their targeting and left most of the infrastructure intact. This precision and concern for the civilian population may have actually worked to the coalition’s disadvantage. When talking to Iraqi civilians, several of them asked, “Were we really defeated? Nothing is destroyed. Our army just quit.”

Baghdad was the anti-Dresden. Constrained bombing certainly did not break the will of the civilian populace. Most of them were glad to be rid of Saddam, but many were determined to make the occupier bleed through guerrilla war.

## The Way Ahead

The American military had been prepared to fight World War III. They were not so ready to fight in forest, jungle, mountains, delta, or urban centers—or to fight guerrillas. The post-conflict stage (phase IV) eluded implementation. Mahan, Clausewitz, Douhet, and Mao incorporated the political and economic element as part of war theory. Today, military planners are searching for “an immaculate victory with arms-length use of cruise missiles, predator drones, and special ops.”<sup>12</sup>

But what do you do after you have bounced the Taliban out of position and out of the cities? How do you deal with non-state combatants? How does the civil population fit into the military calculations?

The post-Cold War lesson for the United States seems to be that the political and economic realms are vital to post-conflict resolution and must be an inherent part of strategy, military planning, and military theory. War planning should not embrace



Abbie Rowe, National Park Service/John F. Kennedy Library

President John F. Kennedy meets with the Soviet minister of foreign affairs, Andrei Gromyko, in the Oval Office, 18 October 1962. Attendees are, from left to right, Vladimir Semenov, deputy minister of foreign affairs, USSR; Anatoly Dobrynin, ambassador of the USSR; Minister Gromyko; and President Kennedy.

annihilation at the expense of political calculations and adjustments during the campaign, but neither should risk aversion outweigh coherent, realistic war planning. One can become enamored with Moltke the Elder’s victory at Sedan and miss the point that Bismarck came up with the political strategy that kept France divided and isolated Paris. An integrated national leadership should discuss the political, economic, and military dimensions of the conflict in a common language in a democratic and open society.

Technological determinists’ claims notwithstanding, warfare is not predictable.<sup>13</sup> Embarking on a conflict involves risk. The best the national leadership can do is to assess that risk and develop strategy that will minimize it. If embarking on a conflict involves risks the society will not accept, the nation ought not go to war. War has become much more than the continuation of politics by other means. It is at its heart a political process of great complexity in an environment fraught with chaos, which most of its actors understand imperfectly. Understanding a war is a labor of Sisyphus, a necessary, difficult, and frustrating task, defying efforts to impose meaning, unity, and clarity on events. The interactions of the contesting sides and other actors and the evolution of the conflict itself negate such efforts. War is a chameleon, changing its appearance and even its

content before one's eyes. This does not negate the need for theory. Without theory, there can be no sound political course of action or strategy.

The immediate task that praxis places before theory is the need to deal with conflict on difficult terrain—both topographical and human. The great guerrilla theorists, Mao Tse Tung, T.E. Lawrence, and Vo Nguyen Giap, recognized this problem. However, their theories do not apply to Afghanistan because, once again, insurgencies are like Tolstoy's unhappy families, each unique in their environment. This is not the first time a modern force faced a tribal irregular force. The Indian Wars of the United States and the European powers' wars with the United States come to mind. The Russian and Soviet experiences in Central Asia and the Caucasus also are relevant. However, in each of these cases, the regular force sought to incorporate territory into its domains through punitive expeditions or direct conquest. Afghanistan may have begun as a punitive expedition, but failure to finish the job properly, subsequent political commitments, and a revived insurgency made it a difficult problem involving a strategy of attrition and political negotiation.

Strategy is the domain of governments, not the military, but the political authorities have abandoned strategy, making it a military-only concern. The military is heavily involved in planning, but strategy is something more. Reducing strategy to a task of the senior military commander in-country and not the government as a whole leads to a military- and geographic-specific strategy. However, any strategy for a particular conflict has wider and deeper implications at home and abroad. Ultimately, it falls to the head of state to explain a strategy, to mobilize the whole of government, and to gain and sustain public support in spite of the costs in blood and treasure. Behind this problem stands the need for shared discourse about national security issues so that the real alternatives can be part of an informed public debate.

In the United States, the “bully pulpit” still belongs to the president. These considerations should direct the formation of U.S. strategy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan. Readers of different political persuasions can read Obama's December 2009 address in different ways, depending upon their own assumptions. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that Obama did articulate a three-part, whole-of-government strategy for the United States and its NATO allies to apply to the conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the words of General David Petraeus, “What that is enabling us to do for the first time here is to carry out a comprehensive civil-military counterinsurgency campaign.” Generals Stanley McChrystal and David Petraeus helped shape and implement the strategy to deny enemy sanctuary and build population safe havens where governance can take root and a legitimate economy may emerge.<sup>14</sup>

Praxis and technology can influence but cannot drive theory and strategy. The military situation facing the world today is different. It requires new approaches, organizations, priorities, and theory. The conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan do not lend themselves to maneuver warfare, air-centric warfare, or effects-based operations, although each is relevant to the task of developing a theory of post-modern conflict.<sup>15</sup> The *informationization* of warfare will go forward. It will bring in its wake weapons systems based on new physical principles. Still, changes in military technology will not stop an adaptive opponent from trying to impose his own strategy on a conflict he assumes involves his vital interests. This fact alone makes a relevant theory necessary as well as a comprehensive strategy that goes beyond the military dimension.

The enemy will always have a vote. Praxis attempts to make it an insignificant one. Theory and strategy should be about the ends, ways, and means to counter that enemy and adapt to his changes. Praxis should direct future strategic choices, and technology should enhance the conduct of political and military conflict. **MR**

***The immediate task that praxis places before theory is the need to deal with conflict on difficult terrain—both topographical and human.***

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## NOTES

1. Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan," West Point, New York, 1 December 2009, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan>> (6 December 2009).

2. Martin van Creveld, *The Art of War: War and Military Thought* (New York: Smithsonian Books, 2005).

3. Huba Wass de Czege, "The Logic of Operational Art: How to Design Sound Campaign Strategies, Learn Effectively and Adapt Rapidly & Appropriately," unpublished essay, January 2009, 2.

4. The Army discussion of design has been associated with the annual war game run by JFCOM at the Army War College for the Army chief of staff under the title "Unified Quest." These discussions led to the publication of TRADOC Pamphlet 525-5-500, *Commander's Appreciation and Campaign Design*, in January 2008, which addresses an approach to problem framing and design before commanders actually begin operational planning under MDMP (military decision making process). In this context, design implies a political-military dialogue among political leaders and military commanders before planning, during planning, during execution, and following execution.

5. Shimon Naveh, Jim Schneider, and Timothy Challans, *The Structure of Operational Revolution* (Washington, DC: Booz Allen Hamilton, 2009).

6. In the work that gave first prominence to the term "operational art" [operativnoe iskusstvo], Aleksandr Svechin spoke of the risk of adopting a strategy of annihilation, which in practice meant transforming all problems into matters of operational art and solvable by combat power and reduced politics to a secondary role. See Aleksandr A. Svechin, *Strategy* (Minneapolis: Eastview Press, 1992), 240.

7. Lester Grau and Jacob Kipp, "The Fog and Friction of Technology," *Military Review* (September-October 2001): 88-97.

8. Early in 1813, while still serving as a Russian officer, Clausewitz took part in the effort to ignite a people's war against France in his native Prussia, although his King was still an ally of Napoleon.

9. The dual content of informational power in this formulation often goes uncommented upon. In systemic terms, it means the information generated about friendly and hostile ends, ways, and means and the engagement in strategic

communication to create a narrative that explains national choices and counters enemy information operations. Of course, this involves many elements of national intelligence. But it demands a convincing national narrative to explain a course of action, the costs, and the outcome. Implausible narratives rather quickly collapse in the face of facts on the ground, or as, Stalin used to say, "Facts are stubborn things." National policy based upon finding and destroying weapons of mass destruction when none could be found comes to mind as a telling example. But one could also look at the conflict in Afghanistan which is described as a fight with the Taliban, when the armed resistance is much more diverse and the conflict more complex.

10. This is not the U.S. official view. The U.S. definition of strategy is "A prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and/or multinational objectives." Joint Publication 1-02. This definition may be part of the problem. Strategy is so much more than a prudent idea.

11. An occupier can change this calculus by removing the label of occupation from the equation via withdrawal under conditions that strengthen the capacity of the government to practice the traditional Afghan strategy of dividing the opposition and securing its base in the cities. Such an end is not neat, does not involve military victory, and can often depend upon making alliances of convenience with local war lords, tribal leaders, and ethnic communities. Lester W. Grau, "Breaking Contact Without Creating Chaos: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 20, April-June 2007, 234-61 and Makhmut Akhmetovich Gareev, *Moya poslednyaya voyna: Afghanistan bez Sovetskikh voysk* [My last war: Afghanistan without Soviet Forces], Moscow: INSAN, 1996.

12. Charles Krauthammer, "Afghan War Forces Obama to Make a Real Decision," *Kansas City Star*, 13 October 2009, A13.

13. Antoine Bousquet, *The Scientific Way for Warfare: Order and Chaos on the Battlefields of Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 242-43.

14. Department of Defense, "Petraeus Explains Afghanistan Strategy," *Defense and Security News*, at <<http://www.defencetalk.com/petraeus-explains-afghanistan-strategy-28574/>> (17 September 2010).

15. Still, a leaflet left on an Afghan door promising death to the inhabitants if they cooperate with coalition forces is an effects-based operation.

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